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# JEREMIAH AND HIS TIMES - AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VINDICATION



BY DAVID LONGWORTH

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# JEREMIAH AND HIS TIMES

## - AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VINDICATION

DAVID LONGWORTH

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# 1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR, DAVID LONGWORTH

Born 14 May 1945 in Stourport-on-Severn, when father was serving as fitter-armourer at RAF Defford. Later that year father posted to RAF Qastina (then British Mandate of Palestine). Whilst there he took ministry course in Jerusalem.

Brought up in Bolton, Lancashire (father's home town) in a Christian family which from grandmother's times had loving concern for Jewish people and expectation of restoration of 'all Israel' to their ancient land. Converted at 6 years old, met and was influenced by many missionaries, including John & Evelyn Foster, of PJM Jerusalem, later also Lawrence & Aviva Tiller. As a youth was secretary for 'Young Friends of Israel', the junior branch of the Pentecostal Jewish Mission.

Married in 1967, to Margaret (Meg), both seeking to serve the Lord. Moved from Bolton to the Fylde district of Lancashire. Both active in children's work in Elim Church, Marton (Blackpool). Two sons born to us, Simon and Timothy, in 1972 and 1975 respectively.

After several jobs, returned to college as mature student, entered teaching profession in 1974 as a geographer in Preston. Became lecturer in a college which was absorbed into Preston Polytechnic, which in turn became the University of Central Lancashire. Became more aware of the need to present evidence to rebut negative Biblical criticism. Active in Fulwood Free Methodist Church, including leading adult Bible classes, ensuring appreciation of the Jewish/Hebrew roots of the New Covenant Scriptures. It was in this period that my interest in Biblical archaeology deepened.

Retired early in 1997, moved to West Wales, whence worked part-time for some years in international academic publishing. Between 2006 and 2010 worked several sessions with Meg as volunteers in the Garden Tomb, Jerusalem, attending Christ Church. On days off explored the land and its archaeology, building a collection of digital images for use in Biblical presentations. (Also toured Israel with Jane Moxon in Autumn 2014) Undertook 2-week independent tour for same purposes in late 2016. Worked as volunteer on Tel Aviv University's dig at Timna (Negev desert) in early 2018 in connection with the copper industry from the Pharaonic period to the Davidic kingdom. In recent years have written several Israel-advocacy articles for the online magazine 'Prophecy Today' and this year am writing study articles on the Psalms for the same.

Currently active in Emmaus Christian Fellowship in Lampeter.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Trust in the reliability of Scripture took quite a beating as a result of the so-called 'Higher Criticism' produced by scholars such as Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), accentuated by the rise of Darwinism. Tensions arose within the church between orthodox understandings of the Bible and the increasingly secular trends that spread from universities and colleges into the wider population. In some Christian circles there was a retreat into spiritualising the Scriptures, often treating clearly historical passages as mere allegories and moral lessons. Defence of the historicity of the various books of the Bible seems to have been relatively muted when compared to the output of the intellectual spirit of the age.

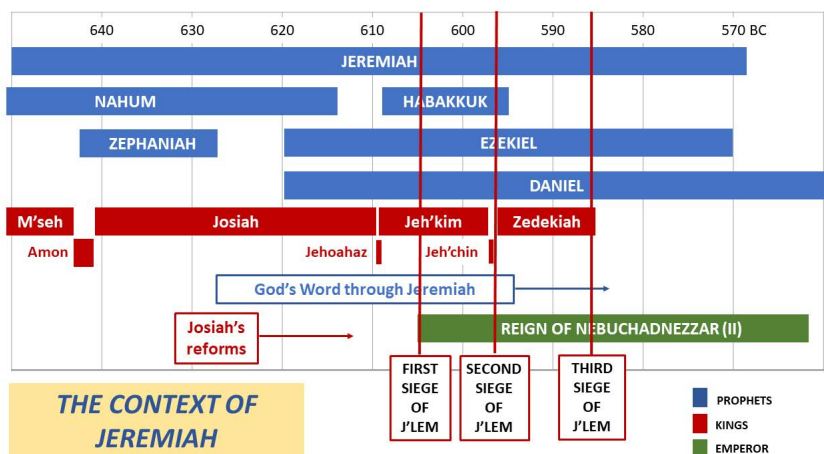
Nonetheless, in the late nineteenth century, having spoken of the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies regarding the defeat of Babylon by the Persian emperor Cyrus, F.B.Meyer (when Pastor of Regent's Park Baptist Chapel in London) made the following predictive comment: *"We are learning to lay increasing stress on prophecy ..... the evidence of prophecy becomes stronger with every century that passes between its first utterance and its fulfilment. Probably there is an unrealised wealth of attestation lying in the ancient records of Egypt and Babylon, which is on the eve of being made available against the attacks of infidelity."*<sup>1</sup> Though he mentions no detail, already by 1854 Isaiah's prophecy of the defeat of Egypt by the Assyrians had been confirmed by the discovery of an inscription of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Meyer could never have envisaged the scale and depth of the treasure trove now available to us, especially that which has been found in the land of Israel in recent decades.

This paper is in part a response to some of Alex Jacob's comments in the Olive Press Research Paper 38 "How should we read the Bible?". On page 3, he states that one of the reasons why the Bible should be taken seriously is *"external archaeological evidence"*, and his third principle of biblical interpretation is that of *"engaging with history"*<sup>3</sup> as the biblical narrative is based on *"real events in real places with real people"*<sup>4</sup>. In order to present a suitable array of detail of such evidence, it can be helpful to focus on a particular period of biblical history. Here we concentrate on the period of the life of Jeremiah, roughly between 650 and 570BC. The diagram below illustrates various contemporaneous personages and major events of this period.

Missing from the diagram (for want of sufficient space) is the fall of Nineveh, *"the bloody city, full of lies and robbery"*, as prophesied by Nahum: *"... the noise of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of clattering chariots. Horsemen charge with bright sword and glittering spear. There is a great multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses .... Nineveh is laid waste. Who will bemoan her?"* All this took place at the hands of the Babylonians in 612BC, some time after the death of Nahum. Archaeologists have discovered the remains of forty of the defenders of the city, and tablets ABC2 and ABC3 of the Babylonian Chronicles describe its defeat by Nabopolassar.

Although it is common practice to speak of only two sieges of Jerusalem, in the reigns of Jehoiakin and of Zedekiah respectively, three sieges of Jerusalem are indicated, the first one being that referred to by Daniel as occurring *"in the third year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah"*, as a result of which, tribute and hostages, including Daniel himself, were taken to Babylon (1:1-7). With no other details given by Daniel, that siege appears to have been a bloodless event, resolved by diplomacy. As Daniel himself was a young victim, the event must have been seared into his memory, so we have no good reason to doubt his veracity, despite some scholars asserting that Daniel must have made a mistake!<sup>5</sup> Moreover, speaking of Jehoiakim, the compiler of the second book of Kings confirms Daniel, *"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came in and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years."* (24:1)

There is even support for the early siege in extra-biblical sources. Josephus quotes from the Babylonian priest Berosus' history. Following his defeat of Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish, *"Being informed ere long of his father's death, Nebuchadnezzar settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries. The prisoners—Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those of Egyptian nationality—were consigned to some of his friends, with orders to conduct them to Babylonia, along with the heavy troops and the rest of the spoils; while he himself, with a small escort, pushed across the desert to Babylon."*<sup>6</sup>



From this diagram we can see that Jeremiah's very early life took place in the reigns of the desperately wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, kings who lived "according to the abominations of the heathen", reversing the godly reforms of Hezekiah, which are recorded in 2 Kings 21:2-7, 19-22. By the time Jeremiah was about 18, Josiah's righteous purges began, with the widespread destruction of images, altars and high places (2 Chron.34:2-7). It was in this period that the prophetess Huldah<sup>7</sup> revealed that the judgment which God had decreed upon the nation would be deferred until after the death of Josiah, in recognition of his godly leadership (2 Chron.34:19-28). The details of the impending judgment, along with a call to repentance, were already known through the prophetic ministry of Zephaniah, followed by that of Habakkuk.

Jeremiah's ministry began in about 628BC and spanned over 40 years. He is best known as a prophet, though he is also a recorder of significant events in the kingdom of Judah and its related nations. Not only that, but he was a priest who would have served in the Temple on the usual rota. There has been speculation that his father, Hilkiyah, was the High Priest in Josiah's reign. Though his home town was Anathoth, a settlement about 17 miles (28km) north-east of Jerusalem, in territory allocated to the descendants of Aaron (Josh.21:18), the priestly genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:13, together with the absence of any reference by Jeremiah makes this seem unlikely.

As a youth Jeremiah would have grown up learning the skills necessary for rural labour in the lengthy periods when not required for Temple service. Anathoth was located east of the Judean watershed, not far from the desert fringe. Here the predominant economic activity was sheep-rearing, moving the sheep around various pasturages. The naturalist, Nogah Hareuveni, *observes*, “*On a rainy winter day ..... from the village of Anatot, Jeremiah’s birthplace, the eye can see, one or two kilometres east of the desert’s threshold, an isolated patch of green sown land, that because of its topographical location and soil composition is able to absorb enough water to sustain a crop ..... Since childhood, this scenery formed part of Jeremiah’s familiar world.*” Having visited the area myself in winter, I concur, and would add that the difficulties occasioned by summer’s aridity underline the power of the imagery of “broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer.2:13) and even of the nobles of Jerusalem, who “*went to the cisterns and found no water*” (4.13). Also, God’s many instances of shepherd and sheep imagery must have resonated strongly with Jeremiah’s own personal experience, no doubt impressing his hearers as he passionately presented the calls to repentance and the warnings of judgment to come at the hands of the Babylonians.

The question of the literary origin of the book of Jeremiah naturally arises. According to Roger Isaacs, “An issue of major debate amongst biblical scholars is whether the core texts of Judaism were written before or after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Many scholars believe that it was during this Babylonian Exile that the majority of the Hebrew Bible was consolidated from earlier oral traditions, or invented altogether as a history for the Jewish people.”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to discuss the important findings from Tel Arad, the location of a fortified settlement in the semi-arid desert south of Judah that began in the Davidic/Solomonic period and was destroyed during the Babylonian depredations of the early 6th century. In the ruins, archaeologists found many fragments of pottery, among which were some that were written upon in faded ink. They are mostly orders for food supplies, commands and lists of names. One of the inscriptions mentions the ‘King of Judah’ and another the ‘House of YHWH.’



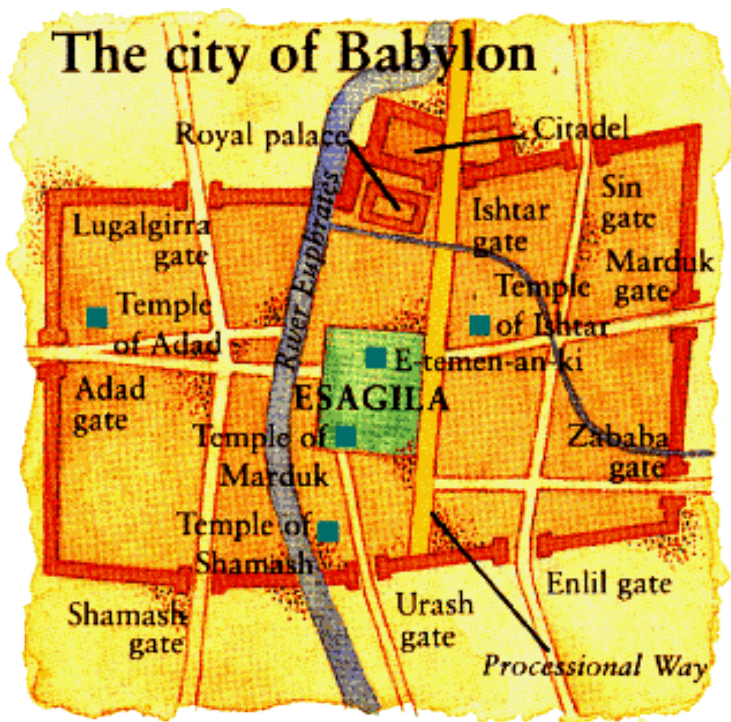


*Colour image, multispectral image, and a drawing of Ostrakon 16 (verso) and inscription: "If there is any wine, send it." Photo by M.Cordonsky, courtesy of the American Friends of Tel Aviv University.*

Such inscribed fragments are termed 'ostraca', 16 of which, dating from around 600 BC, were subjected to very detailed analysis of the handwriting on each. The researchers discovered evidence of at least six literate individuals within a garrison of about 30 men. Isaacs reports that if this statistic is representative of Judahite society as a whole, then literacy levels would have been easily capable of producing the biblical texts before the Babylonian Exile. Moreover, within the text of Jeremiah we find mention of four named scribes in Jerusalem between year 4 of Jehoiakim and year 11 of Zedekiah, a period of only 10 years or so – Shaphan, Elishama, Baruch, and Jonathan. (Incidentally, much earlier literacy is apparent from the record of "*Seraiah the scribe*" among King David's officials (2 Sam.8:17)) "*Shaphan the scribe*" also appears in 2 Kings 22, during year 11 of Josiah's reign. Also significant is that in connection with his purchase of a field in Anathoth, Jeremiah signed (*kathab* – to write, inscribe) and sealed (*chatham* – to seal, affix a seal) the deed (*sepher* – writing, document), which, along with its open witnessed copy, was placed "*in an earthen vessel so that they may last many days*" (32:10-15). The need for such protection implies that the document was of parchment or papyrus, written in ink, and rolled into a jar. A later document, written by Baruch at Jeremiah's dictation, is described as a scroll (*megillah* – from *galal*, to roll) in Jeremiah 36. The importance of names and seals will become very clear as we explore the archaeological riches that have come to light relatively recently in Jerusalem. But first we turn to sources hundreds of miles to the east.

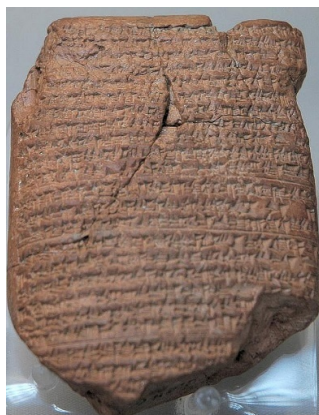
### 3 THE EVIDENCE UNEARTHED IN BABYLONIA

Serious investigation of the ruins of Babylon began in the middle of the 19th century. Evidence of buildings and artefacts came to light and the museums of Western nations contain copious quantities of recovered materials, some on permanent display, but much in storage, with many items still to be analysed and interpreted. The layout of the city of Nebuchadnezzar's times has been reconstructed from a combination of ground detail, cuneiform inscriptions, and the written record of the visit of the Greek historian, Herodotus in about 460BC, enabling the following map to be produced:



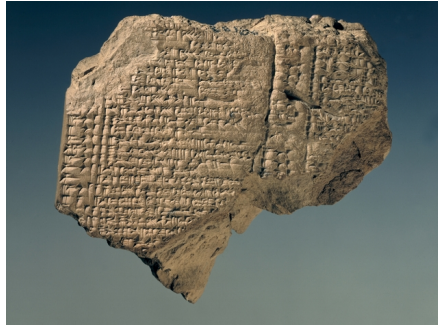
[www.bible-history.com](http://www.bible-history.com)

The sheer volume of inscribed cuneiform tablets found in the region is utterly staggering. For example, at Sippar, some 60km NW of the city of Babylon, 30,000 or so tablets were discovered, most likely as an early library, whilst at Nippur, about 80km SW, some 50,000 were found. Among the many tablets acquired by the British Museum in the late 19th century and now known as ‘The Babylonian Chronicles’ is one coded ‘ABC 5’, sometimes referred to as ‘The Jerusalem Chronicle’. It records events in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar from 605 to 594BC, and was only translated by Donald Wiseman in 1956.



*Photo by Jona Lendering,  
WikiCommons*

The translation of lines 12 & 13 of this side of the tablet reads, *“In the seventh year [of Nebuchadnezzar, 598 BC] in the month Chislev [November/December] the King of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti [Syria/Philistia etc.] he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar [16 March] he conquered the city and took the King [Jehoiakin] prisoner. He installed in his place a king [Zedekiah] of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent forth to Babylon”*.<sup>9</sup> This independently confirms the Bible’s account in 2 Kings 24:8-17. Remarkably, we also have confirmation of Jeremiah’s account of the King of Babylon’s provision of rations for Jehoiakin, found in the last verses of his final chapter. A tablet found in a storage vault near the Ishtar Gate (see map above) in the early 20th century by Robert Keldewey, and now displayed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, makes allocations *“to Lakuin King of Lakudu”* as well as for *“the five sons of the King of Lakudu [Judah]”*.<sup>10</sup>



*Babylonian ration list*  
(Center for Online Jewish Studies)

Another such tablet deservedly hit the British news in July 2007.<sup>11</sup> It was found in the remains of an ancient temple complex in Sippar in the 1870's, and acquired by the British Museum in 1920. Part of a large collection, it had only recently been studied in detail. The tablet measures only about 2.1 x 1.4 inches (5.5 x 3.6cm). Dr. Michael Jursa, an Assyriologist from Vienna, has translated the inscription and has identified it as a receipt from the days of Nebuchadnezzar.



*Photo: Ian Jones/Telegraph*

The full translation of the tablet reads: “[Regarding] 1.5 minas [0.75 kg] of gold, the property of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin, the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to Esangila: Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of] Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.” <sup>12</sup> (See map above regarding Esangila).

The precise dating of the receipt enables us to put it in the year 595BC, just 8 years before Nebuchadnezzar's third siege of Jerusalem (587/586BC). This is described in the Book of Jeremiah, chapter 39. After the fall of the city defences, again precisely dated, as “*the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year*” (i.e. of his reign), Nebuchadnezzar's officials took seats in the Middle Gate, presumably to draw up terms of surrender. Jeremiah lists their names in verse 3: “*Then all the princes of the King of Babylon came in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Nergal Sarezer, Rabmag, with the rest of the princes of the King of Babylon.*” (NKJV)

The NIV renders the second as “*Nebo-sarsekim, a chief officer*”, whereas the AV translates the Hebrew as “*Sarsechim*”, followed by “*Rabsaris*”, the “*Nebo*” element being attached to the preceding name. Interestingly, the first ever English translation, by John Wycliffe, renders the second as “*Nabusarrachym*”. (Transliteration of foreign names is always problematic!) However, long before this recent discovery, James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible pointed out that “*Rabsaris*” literally meant “chief eunuch”, which corresponds exactly with the Babylonian receipt! Whether Dr. Jursa is aware of this last detail or not, he is confident that the clay tablet and Jeremiah 39:3 are speaking of the same person. Dr. Irving Finkel, of the British Museum, finds it remarkable that such a small “*throwaway detail*” from Jeremiah's account should be confirmed by this totally independent artefact, stating that “the whole of the narrative takes on a new kind of power” as a result<sup>13</sup>. In other words, we can all now rely with greater confidence on Jeremiah as an historically accurate source.

## 4 THE EVIDENCE UNEARTHED IN ISRAEL

Rather than dealing with this subject in the sequence in which artefacts were found, this evidence will follow the biblical chronology insofar as it is possible.

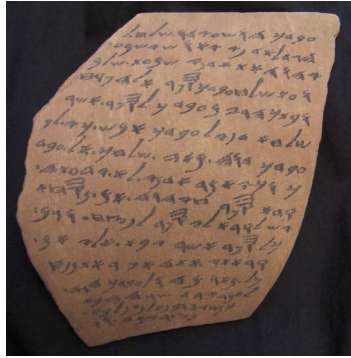
In 2018, whilst working in the burnt ruins of the early 6th century BC Jerusalem, south of the Temple Mount, Dr. Yiftah Shalev discovered a tiny document seal, or bulla, just over 1cm in diameter. Such seals, made of clay and impressed with the owner's seal motif, were used to fasten the bindings around a rolled document. Once cleaned, this one revealed the Hebrew inscription, "*Natan-Melek, servant of the King*". Surprisingly for the excavators, here was a personal name straight from the pages of Scripture. In speaking of the reforms of King Josiah, the writer says, "*Then he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.*"<sup>14</sup> Not only does the seal confirm the name, but also the man's high rank in the nation.



*Natan-Melek bulla - Photo courtesy of  
Israel Antiquities Authority*

In 1935 the British archaeologist, James Starkey, was leading excavations at the impressive mound of Tell ed-Duweir, now known to be the site of the ancient biblical city of Lachish. There, in the ruins of a guardhouse in the main gate complex, 18 potsherds bearing inscriptions were discovered amongst burnt debris, followed by three more elsewhere at the site. They were found to be items of ancient correspondence. Most were from a Jewish commander named Hoshai, who was stationed at an outpost north of Lachish (possibly at Mareshah), who seems to have been responsible for interpreting fire signals from the fortresses of Azekah and Lachish in the period when the Babylonians came against Jerusalem.

The ostrakon coded 'Letter Number 3', written on both sides in ink, is particularly significant in terms of literacy in Judah at that time, as it begins as follows: *"Your servant Hoshiyahu was sent to inform my lord Yo'ash. May Yahweh cause my lord to hear news of peace. But now you have sent a letter; and my lord did not instruct your servant regarding the letter that you sent to your servant yesterday evening, though your servant's heart has been sick since you wrote your servant. And my lord said, "Don't you understand? Call a scribe." As Yahweh lives, no one has ever had to call a scribe for me. And furthermore, for any scribe who might have come to me, I did not call him, nor would I give anything at all for him."*<sup>15</sup> What a delicious vignette of literary competence! This message continues with news of the then current situation: *"It has been reported to your servant, saying, 'The commander of the army, Koniya son of Elnathan, has arrived in order to go down to Egypt. And regarding Hodoyahu son of Ahiyahu and his men, he has sent to obtain ... from him.' And as for the letter of Tobiyahu, the king's servant, which came to Shallum son of Yaddua through the prophet saying, 'Beware!'—your servant has sent this to my lord."* Sadly, the name of the prophet is not given, not least as several prophets were operating at the time, but this ostrakon bears clear testimony to prophetic warning of danger. In fact, in speaking of the commander of the army going to Egypt following that warning, the inscription is very close to the narrative about Urijah the prophet in Jeremiah 26:20-24, in which King Jehoiakim sends officials to Egypt and brings about the death of that prophet. It appears that these events took place in the early part of Jehoiakim's reign.



*Front face of Letter 3; photo by NenyaAlex, public domain*

Jeremiah's warnings continued; he *"spoke all these words to King Zedekiah of Judah in Jerusalem, when the armies of the king of Babylon were fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for they were the only fortified cities that remained of the cities of Judah."* (34: 6,7). Also, *"Obey, please, the voice of Jehovah in what I am telling you, and it will go well with you, and you will continue to live. But if you refuse to surrender, this is what Jehovah has revealed to me:... all your wives and your sons they are bringing out to the Chaldeans, and you will not escape out of their hand, but you will be seized by the king of Babylon, and because of you this city will be burned with fire."* (38:20-23)

Lachish Letter 6 also refers to prophetic warnings: *"To my lord Ya'ush. Yahweh give my lord to see the present season in good health. What is your servant but a dog that my lord has sent the letter of the King and the letters of the officials saying, 'Read this and see how the words of the [prophet] are not good, liable to loosen your hands [and to make] limp the hands of the [men]..."* <sup>16</sup>

Letter 4 relates to one of the Babylonian invasions, often attributed to the final one: *"May Yahweh cause my [lord] to hear, this very day, tidings of good. And now, according to everything which my lord has sent, this has your servant done. I wrote on the sheet according to everything which [you] sent [t]o me. And inasmuch as my lord sent to me concerning the matter of Bet Harapid, there is no one there. And as for Semakyahu, Semayahu took him and brought him up to the city. And your servant is not sending him there any[more ---], but when morning comes round [---]. And may (my lord) be apprised that we are watching for the fire signals of Lachish according to all the signs which my lord has given, because we cannot see*



*Azeqah*.<sup>47</sup> Most likely, this suggests the fall of the fortress of Azekah to the Babylonians, no longer able to send fire signals. Interestingly, early in the ministry of Jeremiah, during the reign of Josiah, his warning of invasion from the north (the route by which the Babylonian forces would come) includes the instruction *“Set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem”* (6:1). The suppression of the fortress at Azekah would have been integral with the Babylonian army’s move against Jerusalem, as it controlled the entrance from the lowlands to the Elah valley, the easiest route into the Judean hill country, where Jerusalem sits upon its watershed. Lachish, further south, seems likely to have been ‘mopped up’ after the fall of Jerusalem. Although Azekah is only now being excavated, the evidence of Babylonian destruction at Lachish is considerable. Here’s what Werner Keller says: *“Investigation of the stratum that marked the Babylonian work of destruction produced, to Starkey’s astonishment, ashes. Ashes in incredible quantities ... Nebuchadnezzar’s engineers were specialists in the art of incendiarism, past masters at starting conflagrations. Whatever wood they could lay hands on they dragged to the spot ... piled the firewood as high as a house outside the walls and set it alight ... The besieging force piled on more and more until the white-hot stones burst and the walls caved in.”*<sup>48</sup>

Great conflagrations are also attested by the evidence from Jerusalem, in accordance with the record in 2 Kings 25:9, in which Nebuchadnezzar’s forces *“burned the house of the Lord and the king’s house, all the houses of Jerusalem”*. The excavations of Yigal Shiloh in the eastern part of the City of David (southeast of the present Temple Mount) revealed copious evidence of the Babylonian sack of the city. A small number of bronze Babylonian army arrowheads were uncovered in an area close to the top of the hill. Similar arrowheads were found in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, in Ketef Hinnom, and in the sifting of archaeological rubble from the Temple Mount. The Babylonians used to gather arrowheads after a battle in order to reuse them. These arrowheads would have been buried beneath fallen buildings and so unseen by the gatherers. Associated with those below the top of the hill, in the ruins of houses, were charred remains of furniture, and many bullae, possibly the remnants of a document store, their owners’ names preserved as the original clay became fired.

*Among the 51 bullae discovered by Shiloh, two stand out: "Gemaryahu ben Shafan" and "Azaryahu ben Hilkiyahu". The first of these men appears in Jeremiah 36:10 (along with his son in 36:11): "Then Baruch read from the book of the words of Jeremiah in .... the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe", an event that took place in Jehoiakim's fourth year (36:1). The second appears in the priestly genealogy lists of 1 Chronicles 6:13 and 9:11. In the remains of a two-storey house immediately above the bullae site another unusual artefact was found – a carved stone toilet! (This house has become known as 'The House of Ahiel' from the name inscribed in a stone weight found in the ruins). Even more remarkable is the fact that analysis of associated residues confirms conditions in the city before and during the siege. Remains of fish bones attest commercial links with the coast, followed by evidence of wild plants and tapeworms. These latter suggest city weeds and the eating of uncooked meat. Animals brought into the city before the siege would have been slaughtered as the siege progressed, with cooking becoming impossible as *supplies of firewood were exhausted*.<sup>19</sup> As Jeremiah prophesied, so it was: "He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (34:2). According to 2 Kings 25:1-4, the siege lasted well over two years, and **"famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land."***



*Part of House of Ahiel (own photo)*



*Toilet enlarged*

Uphill of these excavations, Eilat Mazar discovered two more seals of particular interest: Yehucal ben Shelemyahu (2005) and Gedalyahu ben Pashur (2008). Remarkably, both of these persons appear as ‘princes’ in Jeremiah’s narrative. The first was one of two emissaries from King Zedekiah to request prayer (37:3), and both were involved later in an appeal to Zedekiah that Jeremiah be executed for weakening the morale of both the military and the civilians of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> The sequel was Jeremiah’s imprisonment in a disused muddy cistern, from which he was rescued by the influence of Ebed-Melek into more salubrious conditions (38:1-13).



*Gemaryahu ben Shafan  
(Israel Antiquities Authority)*



*Azaryahu ben Hilkyahu  
(Israel Museum)*

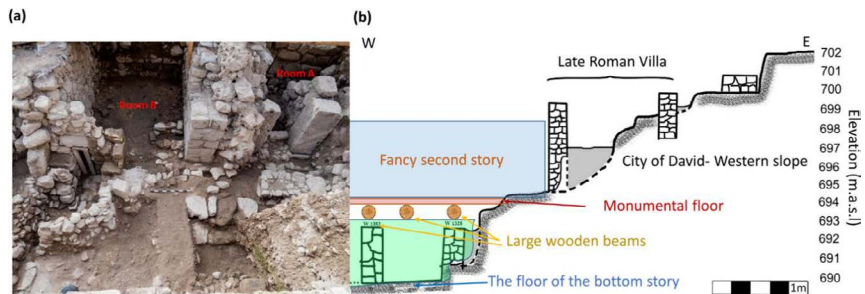


*Yehucal ben Shelemyahu  
(Courtesy of Eilat Mazar)*



*Gedalyahu ben Pashur  
(Courtesy of Eilat Mazar)*

The royal court milieu of Jeremiah’s principal ministry period is attested not only by the seals, but also by the high status of the settings in which they were found. The two-storey multi-roomed House of Ahiel, along with its own toilet, is one example. Another lies on the western slope of the ridge of the ancient city. This, too, was a two-storey multi-room building, as the illustration below shows.



*The western slope house. Courtesy of Joav Vaknin/  
PLOS One ('story' is an American spelling in a  
graphic that cannot be edited)*

According to Yoav Vaknin and his colleagues<sup>21</sup>, the structure had served as an elite or public building, the bottom storey of which was found to be filled with a debris layer, up to 2.3m thick, which included soil and stones, some of which had originated from the second storey. The debris included a substantial amount of ash and charcoal, even some massive charred wooden beams, leading the excavators to the conclusion that the structure had been destroyed by an intense conflagration. Several terraces, each more than five metres wide, were discovered to have been carved into the bedrock, probably to enable this outstanding construction. Also among the debris there was a jar handle stamped with a rosette symbol, characteristic of the royal Judean administrative system, plus *“tens of segments of an exquisitely crafted surface”* that had formed the flooring above the beams. The majority of these fragments were of two layers, the lower being coarse-grained and the upper fine, with the top surface polished smooth, another testimony to the wealth of its owner (see below, courtesy of Yoav Vaknin).



As noted above, the writer of the second book of Kings describes the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem like this: *“Nebuzadaran, the captain of the guard, burned the house of the Lord and the king’s house, all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, **all the houses of the great** he burned with fire”* (25:9). *The Chronicler’s parallel account adds “destroyed all its treasured possessions”* (2 Chron.36:19). Thus, the prophecies of Jeremiah, as well as of Zephaniah and Habakkuk, regarding the fall of the city and the nation were fulfilled in detail.

## 5 CONCLUSION

As the years roll by, more and more evidence is coming to light, driven by an apparently insatiable thirst for insights into history, as much by the secular scholar as the religious. As scholarly and analytical tools become more and more sophisticated, the details becoming available to us are truly remarkable. Not only are such details supportive of biblical authenticity, they are adding to our knowledge of the intricate context of the writers. Solid, tangible artefacts from the period of Jeremiah confirm that we are indeed dealing with real people and real events in real places. The days of using Old Testament Scriptures, the Tanakh, primarily as mere allegory are well and truly numbered.

## 6 END NOTES

1. Meyer, F.B. (1895) Christ in Isaiah (pp.27-28, Lakeland edition, 1970)
2. The 'Rassam cylinder', inscribed 643BC. Discovered by Iraqi Assyriologist, Hormuzd Rassam, in Nineveh, 1854. Now in the British Museum
3. Jacob, A. (2019) How should we read the Bible? Olive Press Research Paper, Issue #38, p. 9
4. op. cit., p.13
5. e.g. Farrar, F.F. (1895) The Expositor's Bible: The Book of Daniel: "There was no deportation in the third year of Jehoiakim."
6. Josephus, 'Against Apion', 1:19  
N.B. There is evidence that at this time Nebuchadnezzar also destroyed the Philistine city of Ashkelon (Fantalkin, A. in Finkelstein, I., & N. Na'aman (eds) (2011) The Fire Signals of Lachish, Eisenbrauns) This accords with Zephaniah 2:4
7. The Talmud declares Huldah to have been a relative of Jeremiah on his mother's side, who resided in Jerusalem and taught women there (Megillah 14b). Verse 22 of 2 Chronicles 34 tells us that she was married to Shallum, keeper of the king's wardrobe, thus close to the royal household. Verses 23 to 28 contain her prophecy of impending calamity.
8. Hareuveni, N. (translated from Hebrew and adapted by Helen Frenkley), (2nd.ed'n 2000), Desert and Shepherd in Our Biblical Heritage, Neot Kedumim, pp.23-24
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10. [www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-5-jerusalem-chronicle/](https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-5-jerusalem-chronicle/) accessed 25 Oct 2020  
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15. <https://bibleresources.blogspot.com/2007/09/archaeology-series-15-lachish-letters.html> original source: Pardee, D. (1982) Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters. SBL Sources for Biblical Studies 15. Chico, Calif, pp.84-85
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20. Compare with Lachish Letter 6, page ???
21. Vaknin, Y. et al. (2020) "The Earth's magnetic field in Jerusalem during the Babylonian destruction: A unique reference for field

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